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5-31-08

This is our last photo of Bea, our exuberant, young American Brittany, on a float trip of the White River in northern Utah, May of 2008. She is resting on the gear pile of our raft after a hike up Southam Canyon on public land. Unknown to us, the sheep carcass she inspected an hour earlier was apparently laced with a poison presumably intended to kill coyotes. A sniff, a single lick, and a tiny nibble was all it took for the poison to absorb into her 35-pound body.

Later at camp further downstream, we were totally mystified as Bea went from a dog calmly lying around camp through a progression of ever more bewildering symptoms. After seeing her heaving and trying to vomit, she suddenly jumped into Brooke's lap with a scream of pure terror. She then charged around camp, jumping in and out of the raft, crying and yelping in a frenzy of fright and pain. Our efforts to calm her had no effect. She ran a high speed circuit around camp, accidentally slamming into our friend sitting in a chair, then launched off the raft into the river and started swimming for the opposite shore (totally uncharacteristic for this dog). Our frantic calls were ignored as the current carried her downstream. She finally turned back towards our side of the river, but when she reached shore, she raced away from us. We found her collapsed under a bush in violent convulsions with a frightening stare, pounding heart, gagging and gulping for air. After 15 more minutes of this agony, Bea died and her body immediately became very rigid. We carried her stiff, lifeless body back to camp and buried it under a cottonwood tree. Bea was a very valuable dog in the prime of her life and her sudden death was totally devastating and heartbreaking for us.

After researching the effects of various poisons on dogs, we have concluded that her symptoms were classic for sodium fluoroacetate poisoning (Compound 1080), a pesticide used in predator control for livestock. This was a truly horrifying experience that no dog or dog owner should ever have to experience. We contacted the BLM office in Vernal, Utah to report the poisoning as they manage public recreation on the White River. This river receives heavy recreational use in late May and early June and other floaters could also have dogs with them. BLM rangers said that they would investigate our case.

Compound 1080 is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, water soluble poison with no antidote. It was banned in 1972, only to be legalized again in 1982. Research of records indicates a vast stockpile of unused Compound 1080 still exists. The EPA approved Compound 1080 for special "livestock protection" collars in 1985. Poison from these collars can also be (illegally) extracted to lace bait carcasses placed out on the range to kill coyotes before livestock enters the grazing range. The drainage where Bea found the sheep carcass (lying conveniently next to the road access) did not have any grazing sheep or their accompanying guard and herd dogs like we saw on nearby Asphalt Wash, animals which would have also been at risk for poisoning by the baited carcass.

Our research on the internet has yielded frightening stories about other pets and people being poisoned and/or killed by toxic pesticides used for predator control of livestock. Our federal tax dollars help pay for this poisoning through the Animal Damage Control section of the United States Dept. of Agriculture, now given the more benign name of Wildlife Services. The traditional means of assistance has included indiscriminant predator control using Compound 1080 and M-44 ejectors containing sodium cyanide. M-44's are baited stakes placed in the ground which spew sodium cyanide when lightly pulled and can kill within 2 minutes. M-44's have killed hundreds of dogs and injured dozens of people. A curious child picking up an M-44 could easily be killed. Non-lethal methods such as guard animals can be very effective in reducing livestock loss, but with our tax dollars providing lethal predator control through Wildlife Services, there is little incentive for livestock owners to use non-lethal methods. Statistics show that improved animal husbandry would do much more to reduce livestock losses than the indiscriminate predator control provided by Wildlife Services.

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) has introduced legislation to prohibit the federal government's use of M-44 cyanide ejector devices for the control of predators. His bill also prohibits the manufacture, processing, or distribution of Compound 1080 with requirements to inventory, transfer, and destroy all existing stocks of Compound 1080 after providing adequate compensation. The tasteless, water-soluble properties of Compound 1080 make it a formidable weapon for acts of terrorism. With the current focus on terrorist threats to America, it is imperative that HR 4775 become law. Please help by supporting Rep. De Fazio's bill, HR 4775, also known as The Compound 1080 and M-44 Elimination Act.

We are heartbroken when we think of how our innocent dog lost her life. Losing Bea was like losing a child to us. We can't ever have Bea back again and we are not going to let her death go unnoticed. Please help make our recreational lands safer. We were totally unaware that our pets could be so easily poisoned by the insidious use of these pesticides. Please contact your congressional representatives and urge them to support HR 4775 and help stop these tragic injuries and deaths.

Sincerely,



Brooke and Cliff Everest
Bozeman, MT



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M44s: Sodium Cyanide Capsules

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Courtesy Brooks Fahy, Predator

Defense

M-44s are small, baited cylinders designed to shoot sodium cyanide into the mouth of any curious animal. They're used in areas where livestock have been reported killed by predators and can be legally placed only by Wildlife Services, an agency of the Federal Government. The cylinder is mostly buried with the top couple of inches poking out of the ground. This exposed end is baited to attract coyotes and other canids.

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IO20372-011

Two dogs were killed in Utah in 2006 by M-44 devices. The first occurred on BLM land in Uintah County near Vernal where a man and his dog were rabbit hunting at a popular hunting and fishing area. The second, also on BLM land, occurred in the Lawson Cove area in Millard County where a woman was with her dog at a community rock pit.

update to IO19441-008

M-44s kill. Nothing can be done once the poisonous gas fills an animal's lungs. Dogs generally start vomiting and foaming at the mouth, and are usually dead within minutes.

The use of these traps is regulated by the federal government. They may only be used after evidence of predators harming livestock or threatened or endangered species. They are not to be used on federal lands designated for recreational use; however, federal lands in Utah, especially BLM lands, are often used for ranching as well as recreation.

M-44s have also poisoned people. Signs in both English and Spanish must be posted at common access points to an area where M-44s are in use.



DANGER!

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**These devices are Dangerous.
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Stay Away and keep your dogs away.**



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE
WILDLIFE SERVICES

Elevated signs are also required within 25 feet of each device. Pets, and especially children, should be kept away from all known M-44 use areas.

Pets lost to M-44s often go unreported. Government agencies have records that are fragmentary at best. If you lose a pet to an M-44, it will be helpful to other pet owners and government agencies alike to have a necropsy (animal autopsy) performed so the cause of death can be verified.



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THE DENVER POST

1020392-002

denver and the west

Dog died at cyanide trap set in an off-limits area

EPA: Coyote poison wrongly placed on public road in Utah

By Mike Stark
The Associated Press

Posted: 06/01/2008 12:30:00 AM MDT

SALT LAKE CITY — More than two years after a dog choked to death on government poison meant for coyotes, a federal agency says the trap was illegally placed too close to a road in eastern Utah.

In a letter to the U.S. Agriculture Department's Wildlife Services, officials said the cyanide capsule was within 50 feet of a public road or pathway, violating a rule intended to protect people and domestic animals.

The Environmental Protection Agency's letter was a "notice of warning." Further violations could lead to harsher enforcement against the USDA.

"You need to take all necessary actions to correct and prevent the recurrence of the above violations," the EPA said in the March 20 letter, which was released Friday by a group trying to stop use of the poison.

Sam Pollock, whose black Lab mix died from the poison, said he's pleased with the letter.

"I'm thrilled that someone in one of these government agencies has finally said this is wrong," Pollock said Friday.

In February 2006, Pollock, a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, was hunting rabbits with 2-year-old Jenna on federal land near Brough Reservoir, about 20 miles southwest of Vernal.

He said his dog triggered a trap about a foot from the road. The small tube-shaped capsule, called an M-44, shoots a pellet of sodium cyanide, which mixes with saliva to create deadly cyanide gas.

It's intended to kill livestock predators such as coyotes.

Pollock said his dog died in about 90 seconds.

The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food investigated, concluding the poison had been placed along a "utility trail" with power lines — not a true public road. But the EPA disagreed, saying the area qualified as a "public road" or "pathway" and therefore the M-44's placement was a violation.

"Our position is it's a road that's open to the public," said Tim Osag, senior enforcement coordinator at the EPA's office in Denver.

Pollock in 2007 sought \$100,000 from the federal government, but the claim was denied in October. He said the EPA's letter may allow him to pursue his case further, though he hasn't made a decision. "It might give us some legs to stand on," he said.

A spokeswoman for the USDA's Wildlife Services, Gail Keirn, said the agency is preparing a response to the EPA.

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"At this point, we don't feel it's appropriate to comment on the specifics," she said.

The case is playing out amid larger questions about whether M-44 should be used by wildlife agencies anywhere in the country. In the same year that Jenna died, the poison also killed more than 12,000 coyotes, including 630 in Utah, according to federal figures.

Several environmental groups are trying to get it banned. A petition is pending with the EPA along with a bill in Congress.

"What happened to Sam Pollock and his dog is unfortunately all too common," Wendy Keefover-Ring of WildEarth Guardians said in a statement. She claimed M-44 has killed hundreds of dogs.

"These devices are unnecessary to protect livestock and yet they pose imminent harm to people, their pets, and to a whole host of species," Keefover-Ring said.

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I 020392-003

Wild animal poisons under scrutiny

EPA and Congress weigh use of chemicals; accidents, terrorism cited

The Associated Press

updated 8:51 a.m. ET, Thurs., Jan. 24, 2008

Update to I 019181-001

WASHINGTON - Dennis Slaugh and his brother were riding all-terrain vehicles when they noticed what looked like a survey stake marking federal land in Utah's rugged Cowboy Canyon.

May 4, 2003

Curious, Slaugh touched the stake, and it exploded, spewing a cloud of sodium cyanide in his face and chest. Slaugh, 65, said he suffers long-term health effects from the 2003 incident. He has difficulty breathing, vomits almost daily and can no longer work driving heavy equipment because he is too weak.

The cyanide device, called an M-44, is one of two poisons used by the federal government to kill coyotes and other wild animals that threaten sheep and other livestock. M-44 and sodium fluoroacetate, more commonly known as Compound 1080, are distributed by the Wildlife Services agency, an arm of the Agriculture Department. The poisons killed more than 14,000 wild animals in 2006, including coyotes, foxes and wolves, the agency reported.

The Agriculture Department says the devices are a relatively humane way to kill predatory animals, adding that because the poison is contained in specific delivery devices, the risk to non-target animals is reduced.

Compound 1080 is used in "livestock protection collars" strapped onto sheep or goats, while sodium cyanide is used in an ejector that has bait designed to attract predators but not livestock. It releases poison into the wild animal's mouth.

EPA weighs concerns, possible ban

After years of complaints by environmental groups, the Environmental Protection Agency said last week it is investigating Slaugh's poisoning, which critics say is only one of a host of mishaps in which hundreds of dogs and other pets have been killed, and dozens of people have been poisoned or injured.

"It's only a matter of time before someone is killed," said Brooks Fahy, executive director of Predator Defense, an Oregon-based group that works to protect coyotes and other wildlife.

"These devices cannot differentiate between a coyote, a wolf, a dog or a person," Fahy said. "When pulled on, even lightly, the device spews enough sodium cyanide to kill a person."

The EPA investigation comes as the agency considers a proposal to prohibit use of the poisons on federal land. A bill by Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., would go further, banning the poisons altogether.

"Compound 1080 and M-44 sodium cyanide capsules are lethal, dangerous, and unnecessary poisons. They pose a very serious threat to our nation's citizens, wildlife and domesticated animals," DeFazio said.

Terrorism tools?

He called the two toxins "super poisons" that could be used by terrorists to harm Americans. Compound 1080 is so lethal that a single teaspoonful could kill dozens of people. There is no known antidote.

Rep. John Salazar, D-Colo., called DeFazio's fears overstated.

A farmer and cattle rancher, Salazar said both pesticides are safe, "environmentally sound tools registered by the Environmental Protection Agency and used only by trained and certified applicators."

Use of the pesticides "is highly target-specific, in limited applications, and in compliance with the regulations of the EPA and local jurisdictions," Salazar wrote in a letter urging colleagues to defeat DeFazio's bill.

Without effective tools to protect them from predators, livestock losses from coyotes and other wildlife could be two to three times higher than current levels — estimated at \$16.3 million per year in the sheep industry and \$51 million in cattle losses, according to the Colorado Wool Growers Association, which represents the state's 1,600 sheep farms and ranches.

"Regardless of the size of operation, each sheep farm or ranch needs protection against predators, and many operations rely

on the assistance and expertise" provided by the Wildlife Services agency, the group said in a letter opposing the ban.

Salazar encouraged colleagues to "stand up for the thousands of livestock producers in our country who provide the world's most abundant food supply and oppose this legislation."

DeFazio said it's unfortunate that the bill's leading opponent is a fellow Democrat and westerner, but said he would push forward with the measure, the latest in a yearslong effort to ban the two poisons.

Public comments taken

The bill comes as the EPA has taken a long-delayed step toward banning use of the poisons on federal lands. The agency has set a March 5 deadline for public comments on a proposal drafted in response to a petition from a coalition of environmental groups.

EPA has not reached a decision on the petition and is conducting its own analysis to determine if the pesticides "pose unreasonable adverse effects on the environment," said Dale Kemery, an agency spokesman.

Compound 1080 is made primarily by Alabama-based Tull Chemical Co., while M-44 capsules are produced by the Agriculture Department's Pocatello Supply Depot in Idaho. Warning signs in English and Spanish are required near locations where the poisons are used.

Comments may be made online at www.regulations.gov, using the ID number EPA-HQ-OPP-2007-0944

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Poison traps kill unintended victims

- From the March 13, 2000 issue of High Country News by Keri Watson And Greg Hanscom

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NONTARGET TAKES: Paul Wright, with daughters Meaghan and Shianne, at the grave of their dog Bob, who died from an M-44 cyanide trap (Mickey Krakowski photo)

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part of
IO20392-004

A rash of dog deaths puts the federal Wildlife Services agency in the hot seat

Update to IO20372-004
and IO09182-001

CRAWFORD, Colo. - The Wright family's living room is cluttered with nostalgia. Old-fashioned gun signs, horseshoes and Hank Williams posters decorate the walls. A banjo and a guitar lean against a wall next to a soft, worn saddle.

Paul Wright's grandmother, Edna, 90, has owned a nearby ranch in this Western Slope cow town for 55 years. "Paul came out here every summer as a kid," says his wife, Lee-Ann. "This is where he wanted to come when he was all grown up." And he did. Paul and Lee-Ann are now caretakers of Edna's 71 acres, where they grow garlic and raise horses, donkeys and geese.

But an experience last spring changed the way the Wrights look at the Old West. On March 3, Paul, his three-year-old daughter, Meaghan, and their boxer/golden retriever mix, Bob, were surveying an irrigation ditch. It was calving season, and Paul knew that his neighbor, rancher Larry Jensen, had called in a trapper with the federal Wildlife Services agency (formerly Animal Damage Control) to set poison traps for coyotes. But Paul figured his daughter and dog were safe on their side of the fence.

Then Bob found something in the grass that caused a puff of white mist. He took off running and collapsed. Paul lifted Meaghan onto his back, picked up the dog and carried both to his van. He sped to the veterinarian's office, where Bob died on the table.

The Wrights later discovered that the government trapper, Gary Hanson, had planted two M-44 cyanide traps on their land. A state investigation found that Hanson had not only trespassed, but broken a suite of federal rules regulating M-44s. Hanson was reprimanded, and later apologized, offering to buy the Wrights a new dog.

The Wrights were not satisfied. They argue that the state botched the investigation and that the trapper escaped with a slap on the wrist. This month, they sued the federal government, asking for \$150,000 and a court order forcing Wildlife Services to abide by regulations on M-44s. Wildlife advocates are watching the case closely, hoping that it may lead to reforms in the government's predator-control policies.

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"I'm hoping to get these things abolished," says Lee-Ann Wright. "God forbid this happens to some poor old farmer - he hits one with his shovel. Is that when they're going to say, 'Gosh, let's not do this anymore'? No. Let's (ban M-44s) before that happens."

The "safe alternative"

An M-44 is a hollow, 6-inch, spring-loaded aluminum cylinder the size of a tent stake, which contains a tablet of sodium cyanide. The cylinder is topped with a cotton-tufted trigger, which is swabbed with smelly goo to attract coyotes. A trapper plants the device in the ground and packs dirt around it. When a curious animal pulls on the trigger, sodium cyanide crystals shoot into its mouth, killing it.

Though critics call the devices dangerous, they're a lot better than the alternative, according to Guy Connolly, a retired Animal Damage Control research biologist in Denver. In the 1930s, government hunter Fred Marlman of Los Animas, Colo., patented "coyote getters," empty .38-Special cartridge cases packed with sodium cyanide and gun powder. When an animal bit down on the trigger, says Connolly, "it ejected just like firing a gun."

In the 1960s, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided coyote getters were too hazardous to humans, particularly children. Connolly was part of a team charged with finding a safer alternative. By 1967, the agency had patented spring-loaded M-44s, and by 1970, coyote getters were phased out.

"They now take fewer nontarget animals and are safer," says Connolly. "That was the plan."

The new tools came with a list of 26 restrictions from the Environmental Protection Agency. Trappers must have special training and eight months of field experience to become "certified applicators." In most states, government trappers are the only people licensed to use the devices (the exceptions are New Mexico, Texas, Montana, Wyoming and the Navajo Nation, where ranchers can plant their own M-44s). Trappers are also required to post signs warning of pesticide use in the area, and to notify local hospitals of potential accidents.

"There's no question that there are some non-target takes," says Craig Coolahan, Colorado state director for Wildlife Services. "But typically it's a trespassing dog. M-44s are a good tool."

Poisoning predator control

But wildlife groups say M-44s kill indiscriminately, and that, too often, the rules are disregarded. The Tucson, Ariz.-based Wildlife Damage Review says that M-44s injured 21 people between 1985 and 1993. In 1997 alone, according to the group, 1,998 animals were killed accidentally by M-44s, including a bear, bobcats, raccoons and 237 dogs.

The traps got some public attention in 1994, when Amanda Woods' dog was killed by an M-44 on her Harrison, Ore., ranch. Woods tried to resuscitate her dog and suffered secondary poisoning from the sodium cyanide.

Two M-44 accidents in recent months have brought the issue back into the public eye. In December, retired Phoenix physician Bill Bunting was quail hunting on state land in southeastern New Mexico when his two German shorthair dogs were poisoned. Then in early January, an M-44 killed a German shepherd in Estacada, Ore., a suburb of Portland. Wildlife Services had planted eight of the devices in a Christmas tree farm frequented by local children.

"This happens all the time. It's carnage," says Brooks Fahy, executive director of the Eugene-based Predator Defense

Institute. His group, along with Boulder-based Sinapu and Wildlife Damage Review, is pushing for a nationwide ban on M-44s. They've attracted the attention of Oregon Rep. Peter DeFazio, D, who issued a statement following the incident in Estacada, calling Wildlife Services' lethal predator control campaign "inhumane, indiscriminate and dangerous."

DeFazio tagged an amendment to an appropriations bill last fall that would have slashed \$7 million from Wildlife Services' predator control budget. The House rejected the amendment by a vote of 230-193. A similar amendment passed the House in 1998, only to be defeated in a revote.

Meanwhile, Fahy is trying to get victims of M-44s to speak out. "The trouble is, these things happen in rural communities. People are afraid the ranching community will come down on them, or their kids go to school with the kids of the trapper," he says. "They get a new dog and shut up."

Not the Wrights in Crawford, where calving season has almost arrived and trappers are already at work. The Wrights say they get funny looks in town, and even threatening letters, but they have vowed to fight.

"I know how the bureaucracy works within the government, and I know that it will take a long time to get rid of these things," says Paul Wright. "Until then, we would like to see them be controlled."

Keri Watson, a former HCN intern, lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. Greg Hanscom is an HCN associate editor.

YOU CAN CONTACT ...

- Wendy Keefover-Ring with Sinapu, P.O. Box 3243, Boulder, CO 80307 (303/447-8655);
- Nancy Zierenberg with Wildlife Damage Review, P.O. Box 85218, Tucson, AZ 85754 (520/884-0883);
- Brooks Fahy with the Predator Defense Institute, P.O. Box 5446, Eugene, OR 97405 (541/937-4261); www.envirolink.org/orgs/pdi/index.htm
- Craig Coolahan with Wildlife Services, 12345 W. Alameda Parkway, Suite 210, Lakewood, CO 80228 (303/969-5775).

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